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Afterword: The Audience, the Public, and the *Improvisator Maximilian Langenschwarz*

The study of European literature and culture around 1800 has been transformed in recent years by an awareness of performativity and by new research into numerous modes of performance. Qualities long associated with the Romantic era, such as sensibility, inwardness, and authenticity, are now being contextualized within the era's orientation toward audience, appearance, and embodiment. The essays in *Performing Knowledge, 1750–1850* expand that awareness of performativity into new genres and across several decades of German culture. They show how philosophy and science as well as art and poetry are publicly performed in visual and aural media, how knowledge is instrumentalized in the interests of different socioeconomic classes, age groups, genders, and national markets. Most importantly, these essays reveal how deeply knowledge is conditioned by being represented in public contexts and by being communicated to often unpredictable audiences. Performance affects not only the way knowledge is transmitted, but even the way it is produced. Whenever knowledge is being performed it is also, to some extent, being formed.

The prominence of universities and public education in German-speaking states between the Enlightenment and the mid-nineteenth century provides an especially rich context for performing knowledge, and several of the contributors to this volume explore that potential. Their reflections on student experience and professorial life around 1800 generate insights into the way socioeconomic realities augment the performative aspects of education. A large cadre of *Privatgelehrte* or *Privatdozenten*, for example – private or independent scholars without university chairs – are obliged to support themselves by offering lecture courses to paying auditors. These knowledge-producers, who at one time included Kant as well as lesser-known figures such as Josias Ludwig Gosch and Ernst F. F. Chladni, are highly motivated to develop ways of performing scholarship that will appeal to a target public. The evolution of disciplines in German universities provides another indication that the transmission of knowledge is increasingly taking pragmatic and embodied forms. Dietmar Till shows that the curricula of German schools and universities shift away from classical rhetoric in the mid-eighteenth century in favour of a “radically utilitarian pedagogical orientation” (64) and that rhetoric evolves from being primarily a system to being a “form of *anthropological knowledge*” (80). This shift complements Kant’s attempt

to make anthropology into what he called a “proper academic discipline” (221), and in his essay Chad Wellmon reveals the importance Kant accorded to popular science, cosmopolitan knowledge, and the “public use of reason” (238).

The link between education and performance is clearly evident in a medium to which this volume devotes special attention: the lecture, lecture-demonstration, or what Viktoria Tkaczyk calls the “lecture scenario” (32). In the lecture scenario knowledge is embodied and conditioned by the materiality of the physical world, the contingency of transmission in real time, and the visual and physical presence of the knowledge-producer to the listener, spectator, and consumer. Texts that are usually encountered on the printed page, such as Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* [*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*], gain new resonances when the full implications of the original lecture context are attended to, including the importance of presence and presentness as well as the characteristics of a lecture course that is offered repeatedly. Sean Franzel discusses these aspects of temporality and periodicity in relation to the disciplines of history and literary-cultural history, where the mode of transmission injects a distinctive temporal consciousness that influences the subject matter of the discourse. The lecture scenario is an equally important factor in the shaping of scientific and philosophical knowledge, as Claire Baldwin shows by analyzing the impact of Lichtenberg’s work as a physics lecturer and performer of experiments whose lecture-demonstrations manifest the material culture of science and the “embodied mind” (205). While this perspective sheds new light on an established eighteenth-century figure like Lichtenberg, it makes other Romantic-era scientists visible in the first place, including Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni, the travelling physicist, musician, and lecturer whom Viktoria Tkaczyk presents as the founder of modern acoustics.

These approaches reveal the extent to which scientific and philosophical disciplines incorporate practice alongside system, belief, and claim. Philosophy and other forms of knowledge, when represented before an audience, demand public credibility or what performativity theory calls “uptake.” This key insight, which several of these essays arrive at through analysis of lecture scenarios and other real-life and real-time performance contexts around 1800, is also fundamental to Edgar Landgraf’s textual study of Kleist. Landgraf shows how often in Kleist the *public* – even and especially when it is composed of silent bystanders – becomes an *audience* whose presence “turns subjects into actors and their doings into performances” (270). “In Kleist, it seems, whenever a speaker speaks, she is performing,” Landgraf writes (271), showing with the help of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political theory as well as discourse analysis that the role of the public in establishing political legitimacy is that of a (mostly passive)

audience. An embodied form of public opinion, it is a presence that needs to be taken account of by political agents.

Landgraf's essay – like this volume as a whole – reads the concept of aesthetic-cultural *audience* and that of political-economic *public* together in important new ways. Other contributors address the elision of audience with public by examining cases in which pedagogical, poetic, or political scenarios take the form of theater or spectacle *per se*. Such a conflation happens in the public commemorations of the death of Schiller studied by Mary Helen Dupree, with their reliance on ritual and repetition, declamation, and drama. Theater also comes together with broader public experience in Hans-Georg von Arburg's study of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's early career as a theatrical set designer, through which he developed a sense of architecture as spectacle designed to awaken philosophical reflection in the spectator. A recognition of the performative dimension of architectural forms or lecture scenarios is thus complemented by a new awareness of the knowledge-transmitting function of musical recitals, popular theater, and public ritual.

These approaches to the performance of knowledge in German culture open up the potential for comparative or intercultural studies that might, for instance, engage with recent research on the institution of public lecturing in early nineteenth-century Britain. The comparative dimension comes to the fore in a different way in essays that show how knowledge was communicated internationally by travelling scientists, musicians, lecturers, and other performers. E.F.F. Chladni stands out as an example of a literal border-crosser during his extensive European lecture tours, as well as a figure who crossed boundaries between scientific experiment and aesthetic performance and between German and French languages and knowledge cultures. Crucially, this volume also helps bridge contemporary international cultures of knowledge by bringing Anglo-American research into contact with German and European scholarship, for instance with the extensive work on performativity and performance produced by the research group "Cultures of the Performative [Kulturen des Performativen]" at the Free University of Berlin (1999–2010).

Last but certainly not least, *Performing Knowledge 1750–1850* introduces a fascinating cast of characters into Enlightenment and Romantic studies, including the scientist and musician Chladni, the actor and lecturer Gustav Anton von Seckendorff, and Josias Ludwig Gosch, whom the editors' introduction presents as a media theorist of the Enlightenment. The series might be extended to take in another shadowy performer of knowledge, Maximilian Langenschwarz – a mid-nineteenth-century figure who offers himself as a kind of counterpart to the late eighteenth-century Gosch as well as an intriguing realization of Gosch's ideas about the performative circulation of knowledge. A brief look at Langenschwarz, by way of a coda, makes Gosch appear quite prescient about the production and

transmission of knowledge by peripatetic speakers within an “anthropology of sympathy” and an “affect- and idea-saturated network” (3). Equally marginal to traditional literary-cultural history, equally ephemeral in their activities and reception, both Gosch and Langenschwarz provide fascinating examples of embodied, multi-media communication in the period between 1750 and 1850.

Born into an impoverished Jewish merchant family in the town of Rödesheim near Frankfurt shortly after 1800, Maximilian Langenschwarz seized an auspicious moment in which to go public with his talent for spontaneously improvising poetry when he debuted as an improviser (*improvvisatore*) in Munich’s *Hoftheater* in the summer of 1830. Gaining a reputation in that medium at that time was possible thanks to the popularity of poetic improvisation throughout Europe during the 1820s (although it still caused a sensation when attempted in any language other than the traditional Italian), and to the existence of an international network of journalists who were eager to report on innovative performances such as these in newspapers and magazines. Following his initial success in Munich, Langenschwarz went on tour in Bavaria and then more widely throughout German states to Vienna, Leipzig, and Berlin, further to England and Russia and then to the cultural center of Paris, where he settled for some years with his wife, a German mezzo-soprano who gained celebrity in her own right as Madame Langenschwarz-Rutini. Langenschwarz and his wife typically performed together with other musicians in vaudeville shows that alternated vocal and instrumental numbers with his improvisations in various genres including lyric and epic poetry, comic verses, or entire dramas. Like other nineteenth-century *improvvisatori*, Langenschwarz performed his (and the audience’s) fund of historical, cultural, and literary knowledge. Improvisers were usually assigned topics from history or legend such as “William Tell” or “Napoleon crossing the Alps” although, judging by the titles of his extant improvisations that were printed in periodicals, Langenschwarz and his German audiences also showed a tendency toward more contemplative and philosophical themes such as impatience (*Ungeduld*), satisfaction (*Zufriedenheit*), or the immortality of man (*Der Mensch ist unsterblich*).

“Langenschwarz is a phenomenon in his time in Germany,” wrote one reviewer in 1839.¹ More than particular genres or topics, his improvisations were above all designed to showcase the capabilities of the human mind. What fascinated audiences who had been influenced by the Romantic ideology of poetic genius was the opportunity to see inspired creation taking place, as it were, before their eyes. Langenschwarz took the display of mental capabilities to an ex-

¹ “Langenschwarz der Improvisor,” *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* 103 (30 May 1839): 412.

treme in the vaudeville scenarios that he devised. He specialized in writing multiple poems at once, on different topics chosen by audience members of which he could not have known in advance; he expressly asked audience members to make as much distracting noise as possible and to remove and return the papers on which he was writing at random so that he could demonstrate his extraordinary focus, invention, and multi-tasking ability. Reviewers, in addition to evaluating the quality and entertainment value of his poetic improvisations, were often led to comment on the mental faculties they revealed – genius and quickness, but also inner calm. An especially astute review by Wilhelm Theodor von Chézy in the *Damen-Zeitung* uses the occasion of Langenschwarz's debut performance in Munich to contextualize improvisation from the time of Homer to the present day, making distinctions between oral and written poetry, folksong and theatrical convention, German and Italian language and national character, aesthetics and “Romantic freedom.”² Langenschwarz's novelty performance thus leads a journalist like Chézy to reflect explicitly on aesthetic creation and representation and the medial contexts in which these processes occur.

Langenschwarz himself, who later set up as a physician in Paris, maintained an interest in psychological processes as well as the sociopolitical applications of improvisation. Like other performers of knowledge who figure in the present volume, he brings together theatrical performance with philosophy and science. His lengthy list of publications includes a pedagogical text entitled *The Arithmetic of Language, or the Orator through Himself* [*Die Arithmetik der Sprache, oder der Redner durch sich selbst*, 1834], in which he sets out to teach a form of philosophical rhetoric that will help readers discover their inner selves and develop their speaking abilities for public service. Langenschwarz claims to be motivated by Germany's special need for effective public speakers, although his book is still more ambitiously dedicated not just to his countrymen but “to humanity.” By teaching the appropriate ordering of thoughts and their effective, spontaneous expression with the help of rhetoric and imagination, Langenschwarz aims at

the establishment of a rhetorical system, through the precise following of which it would gradually be possible for even the most unpracticed speaker to become *master* of his feelings and ideas, completely and to such a degree that, undeterred by anything going on around him, and at any given time, he would be capable of expressing what has awakened inside him clearly and in an ordered and coherent manner.³

² Wilhelm Theodor von Chézy [Julius Aquila, pseud.], “Ein Deutscher Improvisator,” *Damen-Zeitung: Ein Morgenblatt für die elegante Welt* 179 (29 July 1830): 714.

³ Maximilian Langenschwarz, *Die Arithmetik der Sprache, oder der Redner durch sich selbst: Psychologisch-rhetorisches Lehrgebäude* (Leipzig, 1834), x-xi.

Langenschwarz's system re-assimilates theatrical performance to a psychologically grounded form of rhetoric that will lead to self-knowledge, self-fulfillment, and effective sociopolitical engagement. His *Arithmetik der Sprache* was not the only textbook that sought to invest poetic improvisation with public usefulness. In fact, similar handbooks appeared across Europe in the mid-nineteenth century,⁴ suggesting a widespread acceptance of the continuity between performance, professional education, and the transmission of knowledge via the pulpit, the bar, the political podium, and the university professor's chair. Langenschwarz stands out, however, as a performer who conveyed this conviction with equal avidity in printed textbooks and in sensational vaudevillian soirées, achieving a broad geographical reach with both these media.

Langenschwarz disappears from European literary and theatrical history in the mid-1850s, leading some nineteenth-century German biographers to infer that he died during that decade. But a prolific "Max Langenschwarz" or "Max Langenschwartz," sometimes styled "Dr." or "Colonel," author of a multitude of broadsides, scientific articles, and political diatribes in English, turns up in the United States at that very moment. Apparently this extraordinary improviser had a later career of intervention in American Civil War politics that remains to be explored. As we become attentive to what a writer like *Privatgelehrter* Gosch has to say about the media theory of the Enlightenment, and as we learn more about the performative dimensions of German culture in the ensuing decades, we will also be in a position to appreciate how *Improvisator* Langenschwarz enacts a distinctive nineteenth-century convergence of theatrical performance, knowledge production, professional practice, and political action.

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⁴ See Angela Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 205–6.